

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 CA-01 /097 W

-----030879 011002Z /11

P R 010757Z AUG 78

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7011

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 5693

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 8017

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: VISIT OF AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRATION

MINISTER MACKELLAR TO MALAYSIA

REF: BANGKOK 21318

1. SUMMARY. AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION  
AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS MACKELLAR SPENT FOUR DAYS IN  
MALAYSIA VISITING REFUGEE CAMPS AND CONFERRING WITH  
GOM OFFICIALS. HE PUSHED FOR SOME FORM OF INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE TO ENCOURAGE A BROADER RESPONSE ON RESETTLEMENT  
AND REPORTEDLY RECEIVED HIGH-LEVEL GOM SUPPORT FOR SUCH  
A CONFERENCE EITHER IN KUALALUMPUR OR BANGKOK. HE  
WAS IMPRESSED WITH MALAYSIAN RECEPTION AND TREATMENT  
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OF REFUGEES AND WAS ASSURED THAT IT WOULD CONTINUE.  
HE MADE A SPECIFIC EFFORT TO DISCOURAGE REFUGEES  
HERE FROM TRAVELLING TO AUSTRALIA ON THEIR OWN  
WITHOUT GOING THROUGH ORDERLY PROCESSING, AND  
INDICATED TO GOM OFFICIALS AND OTHERS THE  
SERIOUS DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEM THAT FURTHER  
UNAUTHORIZED ARRIVALS IN AUSTRALIA WOULD CREATE.

END SUMMARY.

2. DURING HIS VISIT MACKELLAR VISITED THE FOUR MAJOR REFUGEE CAMPS FOR BOAT PEOPLE ON THE EAST COAST OF MALAYSIA IN THE COMPANY OF HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER GHAZALI SHAFIE. HE ALSO MET WITH PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN AND WELFARE MINISTER AISHAH GHANI.

3. ACCORDING TO AUSTRALIAN EMBOFFS HERE, ONE OF MACKELLAR'S MAIN CONCERNS WAS TO SEEK SUPPORT FOR A BROADENING OF THE RESETTLEMENT EFFORT AND TO HEIGHTEN GENERAL INTERNATIONAL CONCERN AND COOPERATION REGARDING THE BOAT REFUGEE PROBLEM. HE PUSHED THE IDEA OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AT LEAST A REGIONAL BASIS, TO BE HELD PREFERABLY IN KUALA LUMPUR UNDER UNHCR AUSPICES IN LATE AUGUST OR IN SEPTEMBER. PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN REPORTEDLY SAID HE WAS IN FAVOR OF SUCH A CONFERENCE, ALTHOUGH FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS SHOWED LESS ENTHUSIASM AND SUGGESTED BANGKOK AS AN ALTERNATIVE SITE. (COMMENT: THE LATTER ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SUCH A CONFERENCE NOT ONLY INCREASING DOMESTIC POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO THE REFUGEE PRESENCE BUT ALSO POSSIBLY COMPLICATING MALAYSIA'S RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM.) MACKELLAR  
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WOULD PRESUMABLY ATTEND SUCH A CONFERENCE ON BEHALF OF AUSTRALIA. CONTRARY TO PARA 3 REFTTEL, HE DID NOT MAKE A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT HERE INDICATING HE HAD FOUND SUPPORT FROM ALL GOVERNMENTS VISITED FOR HIS REGIONAL MEETING PROPOSAL.

4. MACKELLAR WAS REPORTEDLY QUITE IMPRESSED WITH CAMP CONDITIONS AND MALAYSIAN TREATMENT OF REFUGEES AND SO INDICATED IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS HERE. HE NOTED THAT REFUGEES HAD ORGANIZED AND DISCIPLINED THEMSELVES WELL AND THAT ADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE IS AVAILABLE AND MORE THAN 20 DOCTORS INCLUDED AMONG REFUGEES. HE MADE A POINT OF NOTING IN HIS DEPARTING PRESS STATEMENT THAT REFUGEES INCLUDED A "WIDE RANGE OF ACADEMIC, PROFESSIONAL, AND TECHNICALLY TRAINED PEOPLE". (COMMENT: WHETHER OR NOT THIS WAS ACTUALLY A REVELATION TO MACKELLAR AND HIS PARTY, WHICH INCLUDED SEVERAL AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISTS, IT WAS CLEARLY A USEFUL REFUTATION TO CHARGES IN AUSTRALIA THAT THE REFUGEES ARE ONLY THE UNSKILLED OR UNWORTHY ELEMENTS OF VIETNAMESE SOCIETY.)

5. MACKELLAR WAS NEVERTHELESS CONCERNED WITH THE SITUATION AT PULAU TENGAH, OFF SOUTHEASTERN MALAYSIA, FROM WHERE MOST BOATS CARRYING UNAUTHORIZED REFUGEES TO AUSTRALIA HAVE DEPARTED. HE FOUND CAMP CONDITIONS MORE CROWDED THERE THAN ELSEWHERE AND MANY REFUGEES STILL LIVING ON THEIR BOATS, SOME OF WHICH ARE OBVIOUSLY CAPABLE OF MAKING THE VOYAGE TO AUSTRALIA. KACKELLAR PERSONALLY ADDRESSED THE REFUGEES ON TENGAH, STRESSING THAT THEY SHOULD NOT SEEK TO TRAVEL TO AUSTRALIA ON THEIR OWN, WARNING THEM IT WOULD NOT BE IN THEIR BEST INTEREST TO AVOID NORMAL PROCESSING, AND URGIN THEM TO BE PATIENT. ACCORDING TO AUSTRALIAN EMBOFFS, HE ALSO SOUGHT CONFIDENTIAL

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ASSISTANCE FROM GOM AUTHORITIES TO PREVENT BOATS FROM LEAVING FOR AUSTRALIA.

6. MACKELLAR AND HIS PARTY REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED TO OUR EMBOFFS AS WELL AS GOM AND UNHCR OFFICIALS THE SERIOUS POLITICAL PROBLEM WHICH THESE UNAUTHORIZED ARRIVALS WERE CAUSING IN AUSTRALIA. AN AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF TOLD US THAT MACKELLAR HAD NOTED PRIVATELY THAT IF THERE WERE ANY FURTHER SUCH ARRIVALS, HE WOULD HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TERMINATE AUSTRALIA'S INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROGRAM FORTHWITH, INCLUDING ANY CONSIDERATION

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 8017

OF AUSTRALIA AS A COUNTRY OF FIRST ASYLUM  
(THIS WAS LATER REPEATED INESSENTIALLY THE SAME  
TERMS TO ONE OF OUR REFUGEE OFFICERS BY ONE OF  
MACKELLAR'S OFFICIAL PARTY.) MACKELLAR REPORTEDLY  
SAID THAT HIS OWN PARLIAMENTARY SEAT WAS IN DANGER  
OVER THE REFUGEEISSUE.

7. MACKELLAR WAS ASSURED BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
AND OTHER GOM OFFICIALS OF MALAYSIA'S CONTINUED  
HUMANITARIAN TREATMENT OF REFUGEES. AUSTRALIAN  
EMBOFFS SAID THERE WAS NO INDICATION IN ANY OF  
MACKELLAR'S DISCUSSION ST THAT THE GOM WAS CONSIDERING  
CHANGING ITS POSITION OF ACCORDING FIRST ASYLUM,  
ALTHOUGH THERE HAS CLEARLY BEEN SOME STEPPING-UP  
OF NAVAL PATROLS AND OF EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE  
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SEAWORTHY BOATS ON THE HIGH SEAS TO CONTINUE ON  
THEIR WAY RATHER THAN MAKING DIRECTLY FOR MALAYSIA  
SHORES. THE MALAYSIASN INDICATED TO MACKELLAR  
THEIR INCRRASING SECURITY CONCERNS ABOUT LARGE  
NUMBERS OF REFUGEES, SOME WITH ARMS, COMING  
ASHORE OR LADNING AT OFFSHORE OIL PLATFORMS.

8. THE AUSTRALIANS SHOWED GREAT INTEREST IN THE  
US REFUGEE PROGRAM HERE, WITH SOME MEMBERS OF  
MACKELLAR'S PARTY EXPRESSING DISAPPOINTMENT THAT  
MORE OF THE LATEST 25,000 NJMBERS WERE NOT BEING  
ALLOTTED TO MALAYSIA. THEY SAID AUSTRALIA WOULD  
TAKE MORE THAN THE 9,000 REFUGEES THEY HAVE ALREADY  
AGREED TO IF THE US WOULD UP ITS ANTE. MACKELLAR  
WAS NEVERTHELESS IMPRESSED WITH OUR PROJECTED  
AVERAGE OF 1,000 DEPARUTURES PER MONTH TO THE US OVER  
THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS.

9. AN AUSTRALIAN MEMBER OF THE DELEGATION TOLD  
US THAT ON PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED REGIONAL

CONFERENCE WOULD BE TO GET ALL ASEAN COUNTRIES TO SHARE THE BURDEN OF FIRST ASYLUM MORE EQUALLY. IN THIS REGARD HE MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITY OF USING INDONESIA'S NATUNA ISLAND, HALFWAY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST MALAYSIA, AS A POSSIBLE HAVE FOR REFUGEE "SPILLOVER" FROM MALAYSIA ITSELF. HE SAID HE WOULD BE INVESTIGATING THE ISLAND'S POTENTIAL ON RETURN TO CANBERRA.

10. ACCORDING TO AUSTRALIAN EMBOFFS, MACKELLAR WAS NOT IMPRESSED WITH UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPATKUMAR WHOM HE FOUND UNPREPARED FOR THE CONTINGENCY OF A CONTINUING HEAVY AND CONFIDENTIAL

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POSSIBLY INCREASING VOLUME OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS.

11. COMMENT: MACKELLARS VISIT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN USEFUL IN SENSITIZING HIGH-LEVEL GOM OFFICIALS FURTHER TO THE INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE REFUGEE ISSUE AND ASSURING THEM OF CONTINUED INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT. AT THE SAME TIME IT SHOULD HELP HIM BACK HOME, NOW THAT HE HAS SEEN THE SITUATION HERE HIMSELF, PRESSED HIS CASE FOR A GREATER INTERNATIONAL EFFORT, AND MADE A DIRECT AND PERSONAL INTERVENTION ON THE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE MATTER OF UNAUTHORIZED REFUGEES DEPARTING FOR AUSTRALIA. MILLER

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## Message Attributes

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**Decaption Note:**  
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